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Writing of, Writing in An Introduction, An Invitation

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Writing of, Writing in An Introduction, An Invitation

Michael Rozendal

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This is a moment that calls for writing as we collectively attempt to understand our shared moment, attempt to understand how we are together in our shared isolation. What moment? COVID-19 became a social fact in the spring, settling into an ongoing “crisis ordinary” (Lauren Berlant) framing the days, weeks, and months that followed, and it is that facet of 2020 that fuels these reflections most directly.

For some, this has been a time of introspection, of recording our experiences through daily plague diaries and accountings of vivid dreams. This tally of our everyday, personal experience seems weighted, revealed as expressions of the monumental history unfolding quietly in daily fragments.

But for many, this moment’s isolation is more filled than ever, with wall-to-wall Zoom meetings, with small spaces packed with family— children cooped up for weeks with school on screens, or perhaps siblings scrambling for WiFi, or perhaps demanding cats scratching for constant attention. In this, where do we find the space to write, or the mental space to gain some distance, some perspective from the intense immediacy of our experiences?

In this, I have been thinking of Rebecca Solnit’s collection *Hope in the Dark*, a series of brief, topical pieces, because it does feel like a dark time with “evidence [. . .] all around us of tremendous suffering and destruction”. But for Solnit, the uncertainty of the moment is actually a call for us to write, for us to dream, for “in the spaciousness of uncertainty is room to act”. Not only *can* things change through our writing and action, it is certain that things will change. What that change will be, what it will mean, though, is not a given, and might not even be fully evident for a long, long time. Our agency is in part in our solitude, in our writing, but it is also in our becoming together.

In this hope, it is perhaps our commitments, our values, our communities that might sustain us, that might help us to create space for writing by locating our experience within our engagements that have roots long before and extend far beyond this moment.

Each of the pieces in this special issue speak both to that possibility, to the emerging visions, in constrained spaces, during an unmeasured yet acute time, of the hope in writing that has been sustaining them.

Rick Ayers, from the Teacher Education Department, invites us to embrace contingent and incomplete writing, to “write into the contradiction”, into what we don’t know rather than waiting for certainty. This is writing to figure things out, to

perhaps build from the rupture that we are living toward our hopes to live differently.

Susan Steinberg, novelist from the Department of English, offers both provocation and perspective, celebrating those who are deep in a project, who have deadlines to be writing toward as this can be an opportunity to focus on something besides our overwhelming moment of COVID and chaos. But she also opens the door to not writing, to allowing experience to stand without demanding a retelling right now.

And Lara Bazelon, Phillip and Muriel C. Barnett Chair in Trail Advocacy in the School of Law, draws inspiration from working mothers who she is interviewing, “mothers with dreams and a determination to seek excellence.” Even in this moment with no “home office” besides the kitchen table, no school for children besides home school, it is not the personal words per day, but the core subjects that fuel commitment, the interpersonal that sustains engagement.

These pieces point to what Lauren Berlant calls “a poetic of immanent world making” as we find ways to navigate our ongoing “crisis ordinary” (*Cruel Optimism* 8,9). We are developing new modes of living, new hopes for living together, new resilience amid proliferating pressures and it is part through the process of writing, through the communities of writing that we will find ways to shape and share our moment.